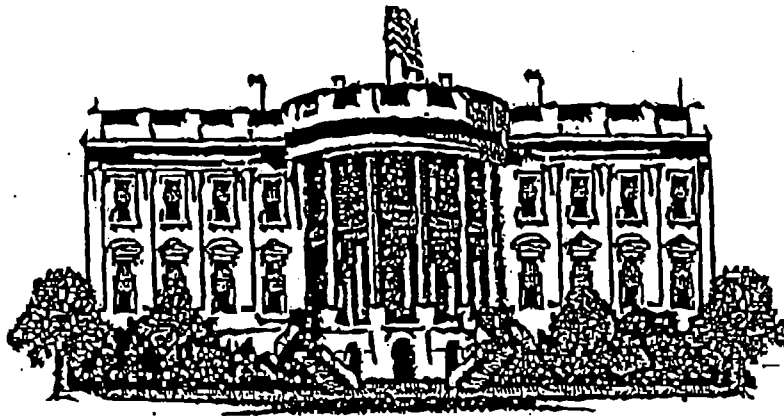


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MSW

THE WHITE HOUSE

Domestic Policy Council

DATE: 12/27/99

FACSIMILE FOR: Eric Liu

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NUMBER OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER): 9

☐ FOR YOUR REVIEW

☒ PER MY E-MAIL OR VOICE-MAIL MESSAGE TO YOU

☐ PER YOUR REQUEST

COMMENTS: Arson Report

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Irene Bueno

12/27/99 02:46:49 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Eric P. Liu/OPD/EOP

cc: Thomas L. Freedman/OPD/EOP, Mary L. Smith/OPD/EOP, Deanne E. Benos/OPD/EOP

Subject: National Church Arson Task Force Report

The AG and the Treasury Secretary are preparing to submit to the President the Third Annual Report of the National Church Arson Task Force. I think we should consider highlighting this report b/c it justifies the civil rights budget and the need for hate crimes legislation. The report also notes that a large number of the arsonists are juveniles.

I am currently reviewing the full report but it basically says the President's strategy has been a success because the number of church arsons have decreased since the task force was established in 1996 and there have been a high number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions but that we must continue to be vigilant (synagogue burning in Sacramento this year). The report focuses on the areas of: arrests, convictions, rebuilding (loans from HUD), prevention and reconciliation.

DOJ is currently clearing the report but they would like to release it soon. I have asked if they can delay the release if there is WH interest but my contact is out today. I will fax you the 3 page letter to the President and 4 page Executive summary. Thanks.

(Tom, Mary & Deanne - let me know if you want a copy too).

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DRAFT

NATIONAL CHURCH ARSON TASK FORCE

P.O. Box 65798
Washington, DC 20530The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Three years ago, in response to a sharp rise in reported attacks on our Nation's houses of worship, especially on African American churches in the South, you called upon all Americans to come together in a spirit of respect and reconciliation to help victimized congregations. You made the investigation and prevention of church arson a national priority and directed the formation of the National Church Arson Task Force (NCATF or Task Force). Since June 1996, the Task Force has coordinated a nationwide federal, state and local law enforcement effort to identify and prosecute those who burn or damage our houses of worship, to help rebuild those houses of worship, to prevent additional fires, and to help heal community tensions resulting from attacks on our houses of worship.

We are pleased to report that the Task Force continues to achieve marked success. The number of church arsons continues on a downward trend this year. As we reported last year, we have achieved this, in part, due to increased vigilance, well-publicized arrests, and ongoing prevention efforts under your Administration's three-pronged strategy.

This accomplishment notwithstanding, we must remain vigilant. Fires continue to be reported. As this summer's synagogue fires in Sacramento, California demonstrate, arson affecting America's houses of worship is a problem that cuts across denominational, racial, and geographic lines. Accordingly, we will continue aggressively to investigate these fires and prosecute those found responsible.

Today, we are pleased to present the Third Year Report of the NCATF. To date:

- The NCATF has opened investigations into 827 arsons, bombings or attempted bombings that have occurred at houses of worship between January 1, 1995, and October 5, 1999.
- Federal, state, and local law enforcement officials have arrested 364 suspects in connection with 294 incidents.
- The 35.6% rate of arrest in NCATF arson cases is more than double the 16% rate

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nationwide.

- Federal and state prosecutors have successfully obtained convictions of 237 defendants in connection with 206 arsons or bombings at houses of worship occurring between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999. Of that number, federal prosecutors have successfully obtained convictions of 39 defendants in connection with 24 arsons or bombings of houses of worship occurring between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999 that were motivated by bias. Other defendants are awaiting trial.
- The Community Relations Service (CRS) has helped over 250 localities heal community tensions and rebuild community trust in the aftermath of attacks on our houses of worship.

We are pleased to be able to report to you on an important investigative development. On April 20, 1999, the United States returned two indictments charging Jay Scott Ballinger with a series of church arsons. Additional charges were filed against Mr. Ballinger later in the year, to include conspiracy to commit arson at 29 churches in eight states. As a result, the Ballinger indictments represent the largest number of fires linked to a single defendant during the life of the Task Force. We report more fully on these and related indictments in the Third Year Report.

In its third year, the Task Force has effectively integrated its work into existing federal law enforcement structures and taken steps to ensure that church arson prosecutions will be a permanent priority. The innovative and highly successful protocols and best practices for the joint investigation and prosecution of suspected church arsonists that were developed by the NCATF Operations Team have been integrated into the operations of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, the United States Attorneys' offices, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and have become a regular part of federal law enforcement efforts. Responsibility for federal prosecution of church arsons and bombings motivated by race or religion has been lodged in the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division, at the Justice Department, which has jurisdiction over these and other Federal criminal civil rights cases. Regional offices of the Justice Department's Community Relations Service have assumed responsibility for the work of the CRS Church Burning Response Team to help heal community tensions resulting from church arson.

At the same time, ATF and the FBI, in close partnership with state and local law enforcement, continue to investigate every arson, bombing, and attempted bombing at houses of worship in the United States. The Department of Housing and Urban Development continues to work with the National Council of Churches, the Congress of National Black Churches, leading financial institutions, and others to help victimized congregations rebuild. The Federal Emergency Management Agency continues its extensive prevention initiative. Through these and other permanent mechanisms, the Task Force remains committed to expending the time, resources, and effort necessary to solve and prevent racially or religiously motivated arsons at our Nation's houses of worship.

We wish to commend the Task Force co-chairs, Treasury Under Secretary James E. Johnson and Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee, for their continuing dedication as the Task Force has institutionalized its practices and mission into the work of its constituent offices and agencies. The Task Force's success could not have been achieved without the demonstrated commitment of the special agents from ATF and the FBI. Justice Department and local prosecutors, state and local law enforcement officials, CRS conciliators, and countless other individuals have also contributed to this successful effort.

The enclosed report details the progress of the Task Force's efforts to date. We would be pleased to brief you in more detail.

Respectfully,

Lawrence H. Summers
Secretary of the Treasury

Janet Reno
Attorney General

Enclosure

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NATIONAL CHURCH ARSON TASK FORCE



P.O. Box 6708
Washington, DC 20530

December 1999

THIRD YEAR REPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 1996, federal officials detected a sharp rise in the number of reported attacks on our Nation's houses of worship, especially African American churches in the South. In response to this trend, President Clinton directed the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury to form the National Church Arson Task Force (NCATF or Task Force) in June 1996 and made the investigation of these fires and the swift prosecution of the arsonists a top priority of federal law enforcement. The President called on all Americans to come together in a spirit of respect and reconciliation to help victimized congregations rebuild and to heal tensions in affected communities.

The President directed his Administration to implement a three-pronged strategy: identify and prosecute the arsonists; help communities rebuild the burned houses of worship; and offer assistance in preventing more fires. Working in partnership with state and local law enforcement and community and private groups, federal officials have continued to achieve considerable success in carrying out the President's mission and strategy.

The success of the President's strategy is clear and measurable. We are pleased to report that the number of church arsons continues on a downward trend. We believe this is due to increased vigilance, well-publicized arrests and prosecutions, and enhanced prevention strategies.

Yet, even as victimized churches are rebuilt and the number of fires declines, reports of new fires continue. We must remain vigilant. We must work to heal tensions in affected communities and to rebuild affected houses of worship. We must not let those who espouse hate prevail. Accordingly, we continue aggressively to investigate these fires and prosecute those arrested. The following presents highlights of the report.

Prosecutions

- 827 Incident Investigations - The NCATF has opened investigations into 827 arsons, bombings or attempted bombings that have occurred at houses of worship between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999.

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Draft 12/15/99

- 364 Arrests - Federal, state, and local authorities have arrested 364 suspects in connection with 294 of the 827 incidents.
- 35.6% Arrest Rate - The 35.6% rate of arrest in NCATF arson cases is more than double the 16% rate of arson arrests nationwide.
- 287 Convictions - Between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999, federal and state prosecutors successfully obtained convictions of 287 defendants in connection with 206 incidents. Most of the incidents involved arsons at houses of worship, but some involved the use of firearms, bombs or violent threats against houses of worship.

Rebuilding

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continues to work in partnership with the National Council of Churches and the Congress of National Black Churches to provide assistance to congregations in their rebuilding efforts.
- HUD administers the \$10 million Federal Loan Guarantee Fund, which was established by Congress as part of the 1996 Church Arson Prevention Act to assist the rebuilding effort. Approximately \$3.8 million in loan guarantee commitments were made as of October 5, 1999.
- HUD, with participation from the Departments of Treasury and Justice, convened a conference with senior-level officials of some of the Nation's largest financial institutions and other Washington-area leaders. The conference was designed to enlist participation in making loans to restore places of worship. HUD understands the importance of maintaining this special partnership and is acting on a number of recommendations made by the financial institution representatives regarding lending operations and the loan guarantee process.

Prevention

- The National Arson Prevention Initiative (the Initiative) continues to create coalitions and provide communities with the tools and technical assistance necessary to battle arson. The Initiative issued \$225,000 in arson prevention grants to 14 cities in Fiscal Year 1998 and \$125,000 to eight cities in Fiscal Year 1999.
- The National Arson Prevention Clearinghouse (the Clearinghouse) was established to provide public education materials and coordinate technical assistance requests from communities. Accessible by a toll-free number (1-888-603-3100), the Clearinghouse has reached over three million individuals, organizations, and communities with arson awareness and prevention materials since its inception in 1996.
- The primary focus of the Initiative is to develop arson prevention awareness at places of worship. The Initiative, however, also focuses on juvenile firesetting. These efforts